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Don't Make Canadians Choose Between Security And Human Rights, CHRC

OTTAWA - March 21, 2002- Human rights took centre stage last fall, when the federal government introduced anti-terrorism legislation in the aftermath of September 11. And Canadians cautioned Parliament against sacrificing their human rights in the interest of increasing national security, as noted in the Canadian Human Rights Commission's 2001 Annual Report.

The Commission tabled both its Annual Report and its Employment Equity Report in Parliament today. Fittingly, March 21 also marks the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination.

In addition to highlighting its concerns about the government's reaction to the terrorist activities of September 11, the Commission's Annual Report also points to the growing need for reform of its enabling legislation. The Commission's mandate and structure are now close to 25 years old, and in serious need of modernization. The report notes, "The work of human rights protection and promotion has become significantly more difficult and complex ... very limited resources are available for ... preventing ... discrimination before it occurs."

As for the Commission's ongoing human rights protection work, a total of 1,485 new complaints of discrimination were received in 2001, and some 1,561 were completed over that period. As in previous years, discrimination on the ground of disability generated the largest single number of new complaints, representing 37 per cent of the total received, up slightly from the year 2000.

Under the Employment Equity Act, which requires employers under federal jurisdiction to promote workplace equity for women, Aboriginal peoples, persons with disabilities and visible minorities, the Commission conducts audits of employers to determine whether barriers exist to employment for these four groups. Its 2001 Employment Equity Report finds that, while significant work remains to be done, there are some encouraging signs of progress for the four designated groups in the public service. The Commission is actively engaged in a review of the Employment Equity Act and will table its recommendations to the House of Commons Standing Committee on Human Resources Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities later this spring.

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